

# Systems of Care: Mental Health Collaboration



## Elkhart Community Schools are Making it Happen!



**WE ARE** Elkhart Community Schools, a district that serves approximately 13,000 students and is known for high-quality programs, quality teachers, supportive learning environments, and strong parental and community support. Elkhart Community Schools (ECS) is comprised of fourteen elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, an alternative education center, and a specialized career center.

**OUR STUDENTS & FAMILIES** are a reflection of the wonderful diversity in the city of Elkhart where the district is located. Of our students, 44.3% are white; 31.3% Hispanic; 15.4% Black; 7.6% multicultural and 1.2% Asian. Further, 17.3% are English Language Learners, 15.2% are identified for Special Education, and 65% of the students qualify for free/reduced lunch.

**OUR TEACHERS** have benefitted in multiple ways from the Systems of Care collaboration with Oaklawn. Most recently, as a recipient of the SAMSHA Project Aware grant, just over 700 secondary staff received training in Youth Mental Health First Aid. The presence of mental health providers, whether they are skills trainers, wrap-around facilitators, SOC facilitators, or a psychiatrist at a case conference, has increased understanding and created consistency between all environments.

**OUR PROMISING PRACTICE** ECS has partnered with Oaklawn, a community mental health center, to develop a school based system of care. This mental health partnership is an element of the schools' multi-tiered systems and supports (MTSS), which provides services, to students who are struggling with behaviors in order to enhance their social emotional development and support their learning. The project provides strength-based and family focused care to work toward helpful solutions. Students are referred to services through the Behavior Intervention Teams (BIT). These BIT teams in each school use a data driven decision making process in a multi-disciplinary context to discern whether a mental health concern might be a driver of the student's needs. The BIT process is consultative, includes a mental health professional and allows team members to share their perspectives and expertise on a student's needs. From the BIT process, students may be referred for mental health assessment or expanded mental health services. Through family engagement and formal information sharing protocols, the system of care relationship also serves as a communication medium allowing for the student to receive maximum benefit from the school mental health partnership. In the 2015-2016 school year, based on current numbers, it is expected the SOC partnership project will have had 458 BIT team case discussions, received 310 referrals resulting in 50 risk assessments, 154 mental health intakes and 217 expanded services for children and youth in need.

**OUR STEPS** The SOC partnership between ECS and Oaklawn is now in its ninth year. It is financially supported by ECS special education funding and Oaklawn. Individual student services are funded through Medicaid, private insurance, or a sliding fee scale. Some students qualify for wraparound services funded through the Children's Mental Health Initiative or its Medicaid counterpart. Elkhart Community Schools and Oaklawn have collaborated with the broader community's system of care to expand the infrastructure to support school mental health partnerships through several grant opportunities, including a federally funded Mental Health Integration project, a state PBIS enhancement project funded through the Division of Mental Health and Addiction, and a federal Project AWARE grant (the first one in the state of Indiana) to provide staff and faculty training in Youth Mental Health First Aid.

**IN OUR OWN WORDS** "Systems of Care has helped our parents be more receptive to services from an outside agency. They make the parents feel more comfortable with the process which has meant better follow through. This has made an impact in school because students are getting the mental health services they need. By being able to have the direct contact with a mental health provider, we are able to get current diagnoses and can change classroom practices and behavior plans immediately to help the child and understand what is needed to help him/her." Myra Cors, Behavior Consultant Cleveland and Mary Feeser Elementary Schools

"Through Systems of Care, our Guidance Department, and our school Social Worker, We have been able to successfully connect many students to the mental health system which has led to valuable services for both students and their families. These students, with the proper support, have thrived and succeeded in their time at school." Skip Smeltzer, Assistant Principal Memorial High School

For more information about our school or corporation, email: [Mary Jo Sartorius, msartorius@elkhart.k12.in.us](mailto:Msartorius@elkhart.k12.in.us) or visit our website: [www.elkhart.k12.in.us](http://www.elkhart.k12.in.us)